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ABSTRACT

The life and experiences of Herbert Hoover are examined in this lesson from the period when he was growing up in Iowa to when he was the administrator of aid to starving and suffering children in Europe during World War I. The lesson about Hoover as a Quaker schoolboy and as administrator of the Belgian Relief Commission is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration files, "Herbert Hoover National Historic Site" and "West Branch Commercial Historic District," and materials from Herbert Hoover National Historic Site. This lesson may be used in connection with studies of World War I, as an introduction to Herbert Hoover's presidency and the Great Depression, or in a unit devoted to citizenship. The lesson is divided into the following teaching activities sections: (1) "Locating the Site: Maps"; (2) "Determining the Facts: Readings"; (3) "Visual Evidence: Images"; and (4) "Putting It All Together: Activities." (BT)

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Teaching with Historic Places

Herbert Hoover: Iowa Farm Boy and World Humanitarian

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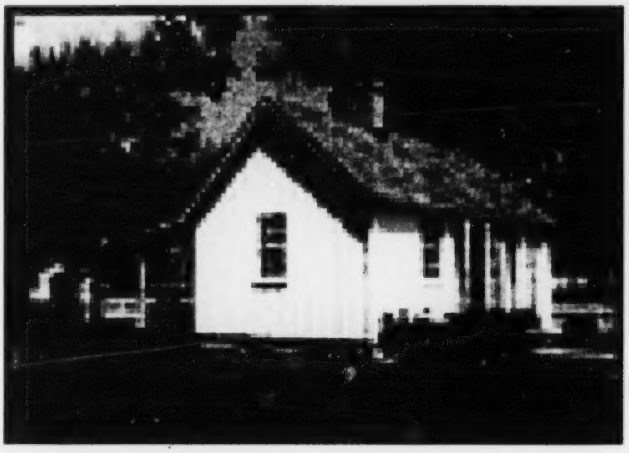
Herbert Hoover: Iowa Farm Boy and World Humanitarian



For some years following the Great Depression, much of the general public remembered Herbert Hoover as a hard-hearted president who claimed that "We cannot legislate ourselves out of a world depression; we can and will work ourselves out." Direct relief, he claimed, would weaken people's self-resolve and self-respect. Today, there is still a question as to whether Hoover could have done more to alleviate the suffering of millions of Americans. What is not in debate is that he was a man who always lived up to his principles and that he was anything but indifferent to human suffering. For his work in feeding the starving children of Europe during World War I, Hoover earned the richly deserved honorary title of "Great Humanitarian." When the United States became involved in the war, he returned home to take on the job of federal food administrator to make sure both American civilians and soldiers would have enough to eat during the conflict.

Herbert Hoover National Historic Site: http://www.nps.gov/heho/

Supplementary Resources

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About This Lesson

Setting the Stage: Historical Context

Locating the Site: Maps

1. Iowa and Surrounding States

Determining the Facts: Readings

1. Herbert Hoover's Family Background
2. Hoover Remembers His Childhood, 1874-1884
3. Cedar County Clerk Records
4. Feeding the Children

Visual Evidence: Images

1. Hoover Birthplace
2. Downtown West Branch, Iowa, 1908
3. World War I Food Posters
4. Political Cartoons

Putting It All Together: Activities

1. Recreating a Personal Childhood
2. Hoover and U.S. History
3. Citizenship and the Local Community

About This Lesson

This lesson about Hoover as a Quaker schoolboy in Iowa and as administrator of the Belgian Relief Commission during World War I is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration files, "Herbert Hoover National Historic Site" and "West Branch Commercial Historic District," and materials from Herbert Hoover National Historic Site. It was written by Pat Wheeler, former Chief of Resource Education and Public Use Management at Herbert Hoover National Historic Site.

Where it fits into the curriculum

Topics: This lesson could be used in connection with studies of World War I, as an introduction to Hoover's presidency and the Great Depression, or in a unit devoted to citizenship.

Time period: 1870s-1930s.

Objectives for students

1) To relate the events of Herbert Hoover's childhood in West Branch, Iowa, that may have motivated his concern for children around the world.

2) To understand the daily life of a rural community in the 1870s and 1880s.

3) To describe and evaluate the activities that led to Hoover's recognition as a good citizen of the world.

4) To discuss and give examples of ways they can act as good citizens in their own community.

Materials for students

The materials listed below either can be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students. The photos, drawing, posters, and cartoons appear twice: in a low-resolution version with associated questions and alone in a larger, high-resolution version.

1) a map of Iowa;

2) readings compiled from contemporary writings and quotations;

3) a copy of Cedar County Clerk Records;

4) images of Hoover's birthplace;

5) posters from World War I;

6) political cartoons.

Visiting the site

Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, administered by the National Park Service, is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, except January 1, Thanksgiving, and December 25. For more information, write to the Superintendent, Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, P.O. Box 607, West Branch, IA 52358 or visit the park web pages at http://www.nps.gov/heho/

Teaching Activities

Setting the Stage

Explain to students that shortly before Herbert Hoover (1874-1964) was inaugurated in 1929 as the 31st president of the United States, he made the following prophetic statement:

> My friends have made the American people think me a sort of superman, able to cope successfully with the most difficult and complicated problems....They expect the impossible of me and should there arise conditions with which the political machinery is unable to cope, I will be the one to suffer.1

Later that year the stock market crashed, plunging the nation into a depression that rocked not only the United States, but the entire world. The political machinery was unable to cope with the Great Depression, and for some years Hoover's reputation suffered. One newspaper called him "President Reject"; a textbook called him "the man with ice water in his veins." In 1932, however, one commentator prophesied, "Hoover will be known as the greatest innocent bystander in history...full of courage and patriotism, undaunted to the last...a brave man fighting valiantly, futilely to the end."

1 Richard Norton Smith, An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover (Worland, Wyo.: High Plains Publishing Company, Inc., 1984), 103.

Teaching Activities--Locating the Site

Map 1: Iowa and Surrounding States.

Herbert Hoover's adult life reflected the values he learned during his childhood in West Branch, Iowa, a small farming community on the rolling hills of the prairie. Founded in 1850 by Quakers, the town had a population of 350 by the time Hoover was born in 1874. By 1880 more than 500 people lived in West Branch. Besides his father's blacksmith and farm implement shops, the town had a dentist, a stone mason, a wagon maker, a painter, a photographer, a jeweler, a cabinet maker, a dry goods store operator, an insurance agent, and two cobblers. Most of these businessmen were Quakers like Hoover's parents, and their example shaped his beliefs.

1. What natural features helped determine Iowa's boundaries?

2. Locate West Branch and describe its location within the state of Iowa.

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Teaching Activities--Determining the Facts

Reading 1: Herbert Hoover's Family Background

Jesse Hoover, with the help of his father, Eli, built a simple two-room cottage in the spring of 1871. The sturdy, cozy little home still stands on its original site at the corner of Downey and Penn streets in West Branch, Iowa. The timbers for this house probably came from Minnesota or Wisconsin because most of Iowa was covered by tall grass prairie. The logs would have been lashed together and rafted down the Mississippi River to a saw mill in Iowa. The finished lumber was then hauled to West Branch by ox cart.

The main room of the cottage served as living room, dining room, and kitchen. To reduce the heat in the house in the summer, the stove was moved to the back porch, which became a "summer kitchen." Jesse and Hulda Hoover's oldest child, Theodore, was nearly three years old when Herbert was born in 1874. Two years later their younger sister May was born. The whole family shared the single bedroom, with the boys sleeping together in a trundle bed pulled out from under their parents' bed.

Jesse Hoover prospered as a blacksmith and sold the cottage and shop in 1879. In May of that year, the Hoover family moved to a larger two-story house about one block south of the cottage, and — as reported in the Local Record — the family was "as snug as a bug in a rug." After selling the shop, Jesse Hoover purchased a building on the corner of Main and First streets where he began a farm implement business. Hoover proved to be a good businessman and quickly expanded his inventory to include pumps and wagons, and he also bought a machine to make barbed wire.

Then disaster struck: Jesse Hoover died of pneumonia on December 13, 1880, at the age of 34. Hulda Hoover kept her three children together by taking in sewing and accepting assistance from some of her relatives. She was often called upon to speak at the Quaker Meeting, and it was after returning from such a speaking trip to the nearby town of Springdale that she became ill with typhoid fever, from which she died in February 1884.

After Hulda's death, the Hoover children were separated. May was taken in by Grandmother Minthorn and Theodore went to live with his uncle, Davis Hoover. Herbert lived with his uncle Allan and aunt Millie Hoover on a farm northeast of West Branch.

The Allan Hoover farm was a busy place, as was typical of the time. The family made their own soap, wove their own rugs, sewed their own clothes, canned their own fruits and vegetables, and butchered hogs and cattle for meat. Farm families consumed about 80 percent of the products of their land and exchanged the remaining goods for other essentials and for the interest on the

mortgage, which was a constant source of anxiety.

Hulda's estate provided $1.75 a week to Uncle Allan for Herbert's room and board, but this was reduced in return for Herbert's assistance with the chores. Herbert and his cousin Walter tended the garden and picked fruits and berries for Aunt Millie to can and preserve. Sometimes they earned extra money for special jobs: five cents a hundred to cut thistles, and two cents apiece for cleaning the barns. They even picked potato bugs at one cent a hundred. Herbert used some of his money to buy fish hooks. He used a butcher string for a line and a willow branch for a pole.

Although the work was hard, the farm provided adequate food, clothing, and shelter for everyone's health and comfort. However, Herbert Hoover's life once again was altered by a death, this time of the son of Dr. Henry John Minthorn, Hoover's uncle in Newberg, Oregon. Uncle Minthorn hoped that Herbert would replace this boy in their family, so he asked him to come to live in Oregon. In those days the railways had emigrant trains to the West. Each car was fitted with bare bunks and a kitchen stove. After some searching, an emigrant family was located that was willing to look after Herbert on the train to Oregon. Herbert was just 11 years old when his aunt Millie packed up some food and clean clothes and sent him off on the train.

1. What types of businesses did Hoover's father operate? Why would those businesses have been important in the economy of a town like West Branch?

2. What caused the deaths of Jesse and Hulda Hoover? How did their deaths affect the lives of their children? How have advances in health care reduced the dangers of death from those diseases?

3. How did young Hoover earn spending money? How does the amount he made compare with what you might earn today doing odd jobs?

4. Describe daily life on an Iowa farm in the late 19th century. How did families use their farm products? What types of goods would a family have to buy at a store? What is a mortgage and why was it such a burden?

5. How did another death within Hoover's extended family change his life again?

Reading 1 was compiled from Pat Wheeler, My Roots Are in This Soil (Eastern National Park and Monuments Association, 1976); and Herbert Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, Years of Adventure, 1874-1920 (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952).

Teaching Activities--Determining the Facts

Reading 2: Hoover Remembers His Iowa Childhood: 1874-1884

In spite of his relatively short time in Iowa, Hoover remembered those years with great fondness. "I prefer," he later wrote, "to think of Iowa as I saw it through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy. Those were eyes filled with the wonders of Iowa's streams and wood, of the mystery of growing crops."[1] There also was Cook's Hill, and Hoover described it as a place "where on winters' nights, to satisfy our human craving for speed, we slid down at terrific pace with our tummies tight to home-made sleds."[2] The Wapsinonoc Creek was dammed to form a swimming hole under the willow trees. In the woods along the Burlington track Hoover trapped rabbits and occasionally felled a pigeon or chicken with bows and arrows. Using willow poles as rods and worms for bait, Hoover fished for sunfish and catfish in the streams.

The Burlington railroad tracks were filled with gravel where boys searched for agate and fossil coral, polishing them on the grind stone. Hoover remembered that "Their fine points came out wonderfully when wet, and you had to lick them with your tongue before each exhibit."3

Hoover went on to recall that "Iowa in those years as in these, was filled with days of school — and who does not remember with a glow some gentle woman who with infinite patience and kindness drilled into us those foundations of all we know today?"4 Hoover also regularly attended meetings of the Religious Society of Friends, a group better known as Quakers. Individual Bible reading was part of their concept of education. "Before I left Iowa," Hoover noted, "I had read the Bible in daily stints from cover to cover."5 The Quakers strongly supported education and the values of thrift and individual enterprise. They worked hard and could always be counted upon to help others in need.

Although Hoover left Iowa at the age of 11, his adult character owed much to those years. He maintained an interest in the outdoors, and he never forgot the lessons of his early religious training.

1. What kinds of amusements did Hoover enjoy as a child? How do these compare with the activities children pursue today?

2. What was Hoover's attitude toward school and school teachers when he wrote his memoirs? Do you think you will have the same attitude about school when you are an adult as you do now?

3. How do you think Hoover's religious beliefs influenced the values he held as an adult?

Reading 2 was compiled from Herbert Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, Years of Adventure, 1874-1920 (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952).

1Hoover, 1.
2Ibid.
3Ibid., 3.
4Ibid, 5.
5Ibid., 8.

Teaching Activities--Determining the Facts

Document 1: Cedar County Clerk Records

Springdale Iowa 5 mo.
Rec of Jamie Tatum guardian of the est
H. Hoover Fourteen 92. Dollars ($14.92)
in full for clothing purchased & made for said
H. H. Hoover.
Items of clothing.

Allen Hoover

one pair pants	$1.23
Making of same	.50
Shoes	2.50
Arithmetic	.75
Mending boots	.10
box of Collars.	.10
Suit of Clothes	6.00
hat	.55
hat for every day	.12
box of collars	.11
hat for every day	.15
Suspenders	.15
Shirting	.40
Making two shirts	.30
Material for pants	1.27
Making	.50
	$14.92

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1. What is the purpose of this document?

2. What kinds of costs were paid by Laurie Tatum, the guardian of Herbert Hoover, to Allen Hoover for the care of his nephew? How do those costs compare with prices paid today? Why do you think prices of goods have changed over the years?

3. What items of clothing can you find on the list that are not commonly worn by young people today?

Teaching Activities--Determining the Facts

Reading 3: Feeding the Children

World War I (1914-18) brought enormous destruction to European nations. The German army swept through Belgium on its way to France and occupied that nation for the rest of the war. Belgium normally bought most of its food from other nations, and when the war prevented these imports, the population was reduced to near starvation. Surveys taken early in the war showed that some 10 to 12 million children in a total of 18 other nations were also suffering from malnutrition or starvation.

American diplomats and displaced Belgians searched for someone who would lead the Commission for the Relief of Belgium. In 1914, they chose Herbert Hoover, who was living in London at the time and who, during his brilliant career, had become well known as an effective leader and an aggressive negotiator.

Hoover had worked hard to establish his career. After his move to Oregon in 1885, he attended school for a time, but left at age 15 to go to work as a clerk in an office. Although he did not graduate from high school, he continued to read and study on his own. In 1891, he was admitted to the first four-year class at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, and worked at odd jobs to pay his tuition and room and board. Hoover's first job as a college graduate was pushing a cart in a mine. That did not last long. Within a few years, he became a well-known mining engineer with offices in San Francisco, New York City, Paris, London, and Petrograd, Russia. He was already a millionaire several times over when the war broke out.

He stood to make many more millions from the increased demand brought by the war for ores and metals. When he was asked to head up a relief mission, Hoover took a day to think over the offer, and then accepted, calling it "the greatest job Americans have undertaken in the cause of humanity."[1] He knew he would lose a great deal of money since he would have to neglect his business. He accepted no salary from the commission he set up, and he spent some of his personal fortune in his efforts. To a close friend he asserted, "Let the fortune go to hell."[2]

Experience proved that if the children received one hot supplemental meal daily in schoolhouses and special canteens, in addition to their families' meager rations, they made a dramatic and quick recovery. Hoover spent all of his waking hours trying to ensure that those supplemental meals would be available to any youngster who would benefit from them. Years later he reflected on his experiences with the relief commission:

> Love of children is a biological trait common to all races....It therefore seemed to me that around this devotion there could be built a renaissance of unity and hope among the distracted elders....It was not expensive to rehabilitate an individual child in this way....The cost of each meal to us could be measured by a few cents. A pound of concentrated food, in rich soup,

stews, milk, porridge, cocoa, sugar minerals and cod liver oil daily is like water to a wilting plant.[3]

1. How many European children were underfed and ill during the early years of World War I?

2. Why do you think Hoover felt that feeding the children was important to the future of the world?

3. What personal sacrifices did Hoover make in accepting the position as head of a relief commission? What aspects of his childhood might have influenced that decision?

Reading 3 was compiled from Herbert Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, Years of Adventure, 1874-1920 (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952); Susan Clinton, Encyclopedia of American Presidents: Herbert Hoover (Chicago: Children's Press, 1988); Richard Norton Smith, An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover (Worland, Wyo.: High Plains Publishing Company, Inc., 1984).

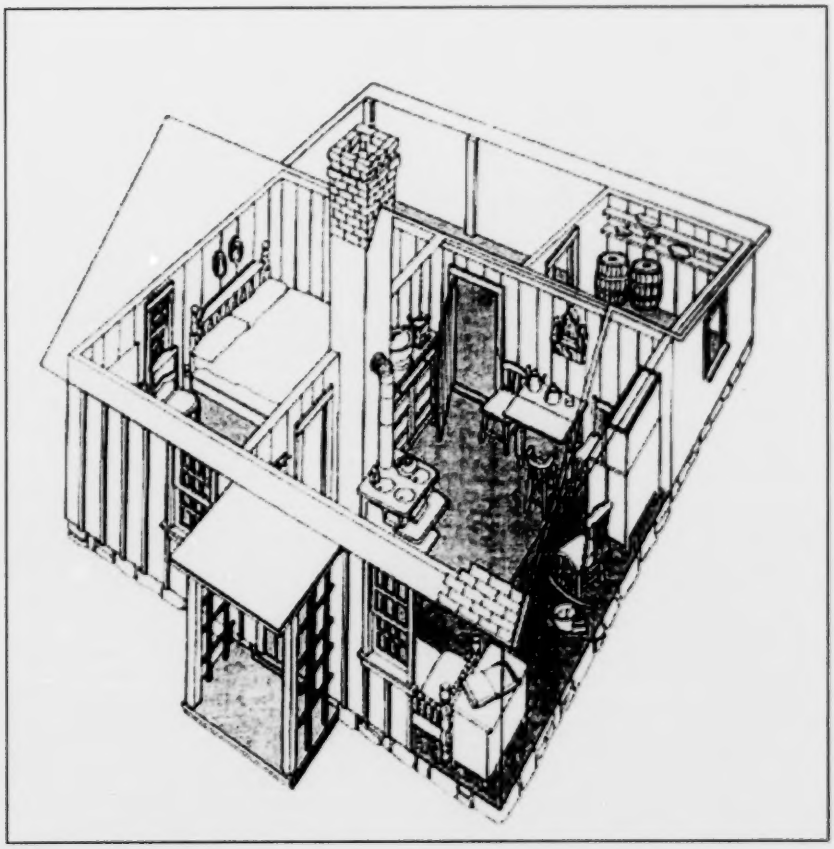
1Clinton, 9.
2Smith, 81.
3Hoover, 322.

Teaching Activities--Visual Evidence

Photo 1: Hoover's Birthplace.

(Herbert Hoover National Historic Site)

Drawing 1: Schematic Drawing of Hoover's Birthplace.



Herbert Hoover National Historic Site)

1. One observer described Hoover's birthplace as "modest but pleasant." Do you agree with that description? Why or why not?

2. Describe how the Hoover family used the space in their cottage. (You may need to refer to Reading 1.)

3. Measure out a 14' by 20' space in the classroom or school yard. What do you think it would have been like for a family of five to live in a space this size? How might a family use such a space today?

Teaching Activities--Visual Evidence

Photo 2: Downtown West Branch, Iowa, 1908.

(Herbert Hoover National Historic Site)

1. What are some of the similarities and differences between this street in West Branch and the street where you live?

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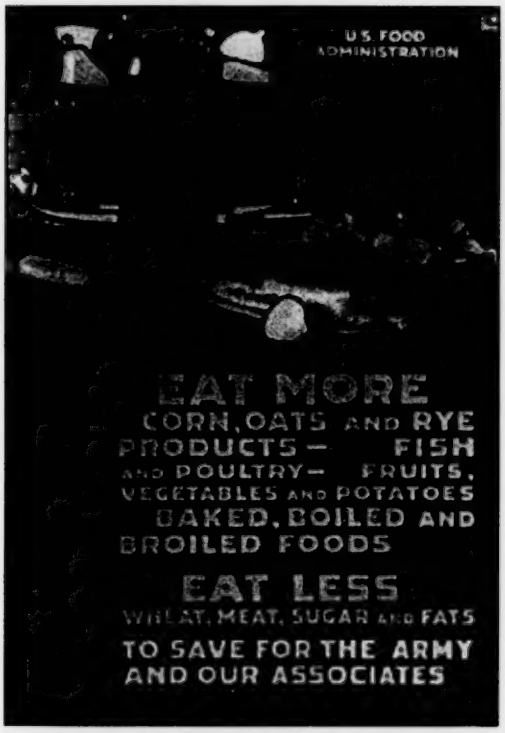
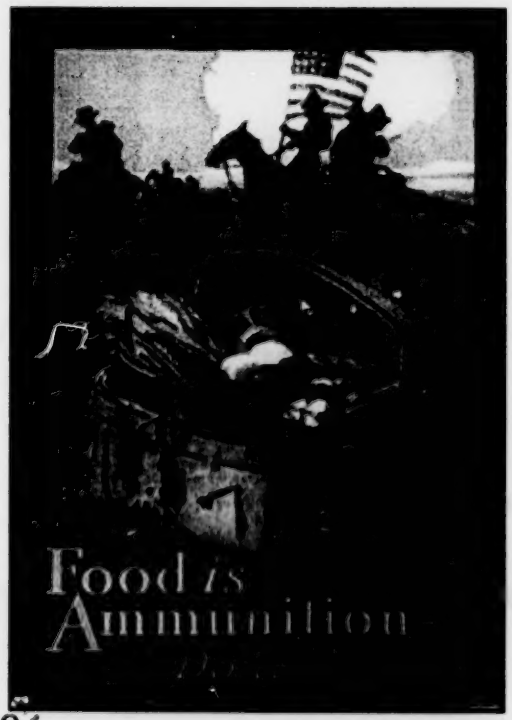
Teaching Activities--Visual Evidence
Illustration 1: World War I Posters





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(Posters Courtesy of Herbert Hoover Library)

Posters like these were found all over the United States and were used to remind people to conserve food so there would be enough for American servicemen. As head of the United States Food Administration during World War I, Hoover encouraged Americans to grow more of their own food and to give up eating certain foods needed by American troops. The slogan "meatless, wheatless, sweetless, heatless" was often repeated.

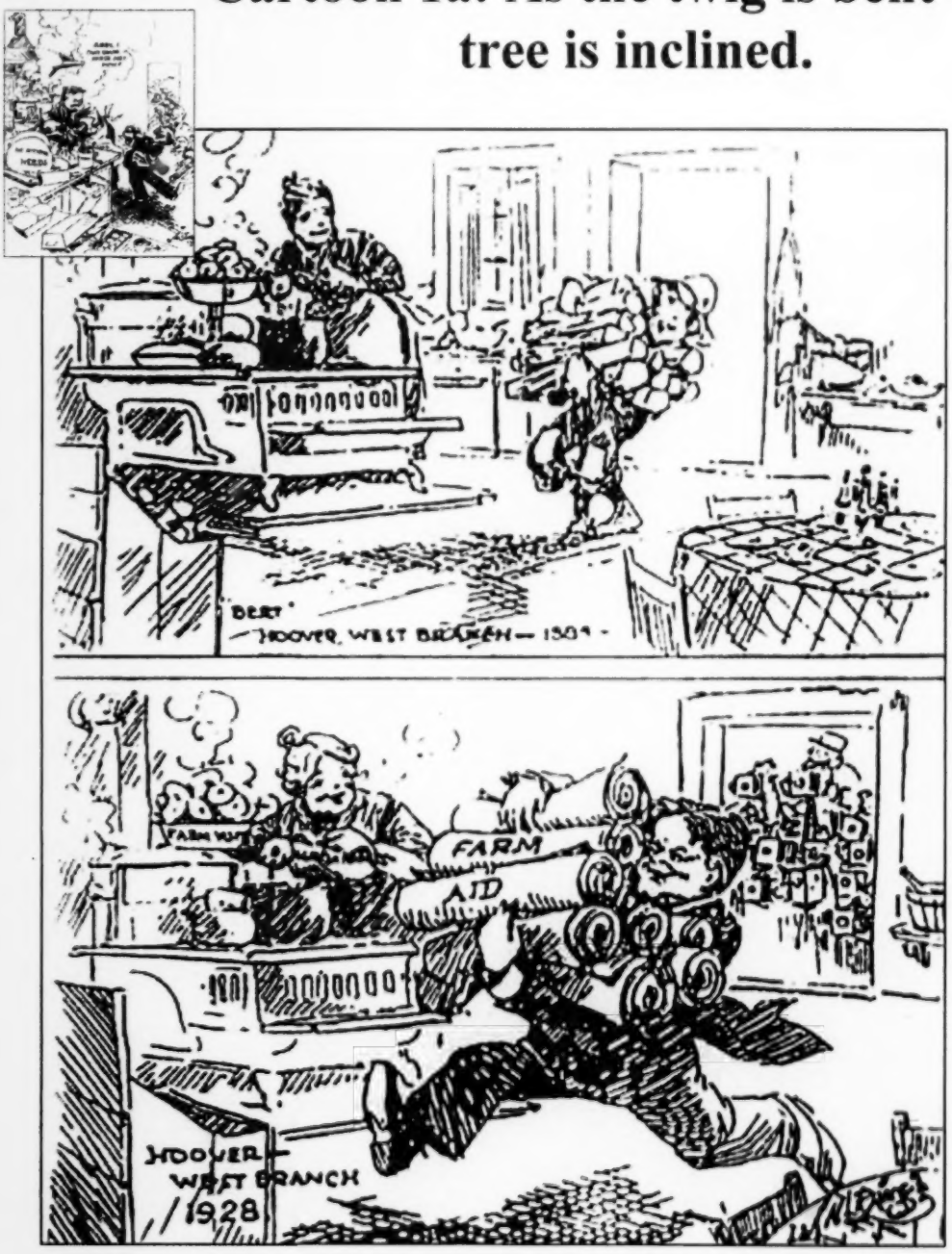
1. Do you think the posters are effective? Why or why not?

2. Would observing the U. S. Food Administration's slogan be difficult for you today? Why or why not?

3. Draw your own poster to try and convince other students to give up a favorite food.

Teaching Activities--Visual Evidence

Cartoon 1a: As the twig is bent — the tree is inclined.



(Courtesy of J.N. "Ding" Darling Foudation)

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Cartoon 1b: That's all right, Mr. President. We can just shake hands with ourselves.

(Courtesy of J.N. "Ding" Darling Foundation)

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1. In your own words, describe what each cartoon means.

2. What additional information is added by the captions?

3. What character traits and values is the cartoonist emphasizing?

4. What kind of influence do you think cartoons have on how the public perceives political officials, especially the president?

Putting It All Together

The childhood experiences and the early public career of Herbert Hoover seem to be in sharp contrast to his performance and reputation as president. The following activities will help students to put "both" Herbert Hoovers into perspective.

Activity 1: Recreating a Personal Childhood

Have students look again at the cartoons and think about the caption "As the twig is bent — the tree is inclined." Then discuss with them the idea that each human experience is different from any other. That is, many young boys of Hoover's time probably carried in wood for the kitchen stove, but few of them went on to become public servants as Hoover did. Still, many of those boys did grow up to be thoughtful and caring individuals. Have students reflect on their own first 11 years. Have them then pretend they are 77 years old and writing their own memoirs. Ask them to write three or four descriptive paragraphs similar to those in Reading 2. What amusements did they enjoy as young children? How were these amusements shaped by their surroundings? What role has school, neighborhood, and family played in shaping their values? Have a few volunteers share their memoirs. Emphasize to the class that while we are shaped by our past, we are not bound by it.

Activity 2: Hoover and U.S. History

Have students check three or four different U.S. history textbooks to see how the authors treat Hoover. What kinds of adjectives are used to describe the man and his programs? How do these adjectives square with what they learned in this lesson about Hoover's Iowa childhood and his efforts to save the children of Europe? Have students write a short, balanced biography of Hoover using materials provided in this lesson, in U.S. history books, and in books available in most school and public libraries.
Some useful works include: Suzanne Hilton, *The World of Young Herbert Hoover* (New York: Walker and Company, 1987); Susan Clinton, *Encyclopedia of American Presidents: Herbert Hoover* (Chicago: Children's Press, 1988); Richard Norton Smith, *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover* (Worland, Wyo.: High Plains Publishing Company, Inc., 1984); and Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, Years of Adventure, 1874-1920* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952). When essays are completed, have students discuss and edit them in small groups. If essays are of sufficiently good quality, have the class present them to the school library for use by subsequent classes that will be studying U.S. history.

Activity 3: Citizenship and the Local Community

The lesson mentions that a survey taken early in World War I showed that many millions of children were suffering from malnutrition or starvation. Explain to students that surveys often are used by social scientists to gather information necessary to formulate generalizations. Have students use this technique to gather information on the attitudes a cross section of their local community or neighborhood holds toward the concept of good citizenship. Have them note that Hoover, before the Great Depression, was called a "Great Humanitarian," and considered a good

citizen of the world. Have students draw out from the readings the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that led to Hoover's value system.

Next, have students construct a survey that will help them to understand what their community regards as good citizenship. They might consider using such questions as: What attributes of character do good citizens share? What kinds of activities that benefit the community do good citizens take part in? After the questions have been agreed on by the class, have each student survey three people — teachers, parents, neighbors, local business people. When the surveys are completed, have students work in groups of three to discuss and tally responses. A final tally should then be compiled and presented to the class. Conduct a discussion based on the results of the survey. Finally, ask the class as a whole to develop a definition of good citizenship and list ways in which they could act as good citizens in their own community.

Herbert Hoover--Supplementary Resources

Herbert Hoover: Iowa Farm Boy and World Humanitarian emphasizes the importance that Hoover's upbringing had upon his future humanitarian works. Below are resources for future exploration of Herbert Hoover and his presidency.

Herbert Hoover National Historic Site
The Herbert Hoover National Historic Site is one unit of the National Park Service. Visit park's web pages for additional information.

Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum
The Presidential Library and Museum maintains the Herbert Hoover Papers and includes:

- photographs of Herbert and Lou Hoover;
- resources for educators;
- information about West Branch, Iowa.

National Archives
The Archives has placed on its web site a large number of items about Herbert Hoover and his presidency. To find them, visit the NAIL Digital Copies search engine.

The White House
The White House website provides a biographical sketch of Herbert Hoover and a copy of his Inaugural Address.

American Presidents: Life Portraits
In this series, C-SPAN explores the life stories of the 41 men who have been president by traveling to presidential homes, museums, libraries, and grave sites and speaking with presidential scholars *American Presidents: Life Portraits* will focus on one president each week beginning March 15, 1999. Herbert Hoover will be featured the week of October 4, 1999.

West Branch, Iowa
This site looks at the history of Herbert Hoover's hometown.